



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Celebrating Washington's Birthday in Alexandria

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Image: A poster printed for Washington's birthday in the late 1800's by the Franklin Printing Co., Library of Congress.

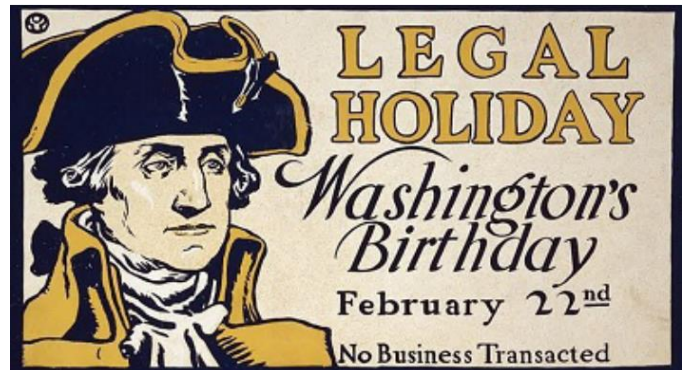
While many people throughout the country recognize President's Day on the third Monday in February, it is more accurate to call it Washington's Birthday, as it was originally on Feb. 22 and was set aside to remember General Washington. This date was celebrated by Americans long before Congress declared it a federal holiday.

In 1832, during the centennial of his birth, Congress created a joint committee to arrange festivities for this occasion, and out of respect for Washington's memory and commemoration of his birth, Congress adjourned on Feb. 22, 1832.

In 1862, prompted by a memorial from the mayor and other citizens of Philadelphia, the House and Senate commemorated the 130th anniversary of Washington's birth by reading aloud his Farewell Address. In a special joint session held in the House chamber, the House and Senate, along with several officials, justices and other high-ranking officers of the Army and Navy, gathered to listen to the secretary of state read the address. This reading eventually became an annual event for the Senate and is still a tradition that is observed to this day.

Washington's Birthday, Feb. 22, became a legal holiday in 1879 and was well celebrated throughout most of the 20th century until 1968. On June 28, 1968 Congress passed the "Uniform Monday Holiday Act," which had uniform annual observances of certain public holidays on Mondays, to allow federal employees to have more three-day weekends to raise morale. Unfortunately, with the passing of this law, this move made it impossible to celebrate Washington's birthday on his actual birthdate.

While the original date has moved, we can all observe this holiday and honor the president that it was meant for. In Alexandria, we honor our first president and fellow citizen with a full month of activities. Washington's hometown will forever honor him in perpetuity like no other city or country can.



"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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